

# Castlemaine

## Naturalist

September 2004

Vol. 28.8 #314



### Thoughts on Sri Lanka – Helen Morris

We spent 18 days at the end of July in Sri Lanka which is the size of Tasmania and situated between 9 and 5 degrees north of the equator. Its history goes back millennia, being mentioned in the 2000 year old Hindu epic Ramayana. Muslim traders knew it as Serendib and then the Indians, Chinese, Portuguese and Dutch came for the spice trades. The British supplanted the Dutch in 1796 and by 1815 had control of the whole country including the kingdom of Kandy.

Serendipity - the faculty of making unexpected and happy discoveries - describes our visit. The name Ceylon evolved from the colonials, while Sri Lanka was adopted in 1972 after independence—Sri means resplendent in Sinhalese.

Legends abound – did Buddha leave his foot print on Adam's Peak or was it Adam who set forth on earth from this highest and sacred mountain mostly shrouded in cloud ? Sinhalese kingdoms rose and fell, and date back to 4<sup>th</sup> C BC - Anuradhapur, Polonnawaruwa ( the capital for over 200 years). When the colonials came the Tamils at Jaffna and other kingdoms further south were taken over but the kingdom of Kandy held out till the British came.

These ancient capitals leave a record of the wonderful past culture. Archeologists are gradually digging up this past, restoring foundations of palaces, gardens, and the magnificent water storages known as tanks. These tanks are still in use supplying water all year round after the short seasonal monsoon rains. Some international finance helps with restoration but there is so much to do.

Of the 18 National Parks we spent time in five.

At **Bundala**, on the south coast, with salt pans there was an abundance of water birds. It is the end of line for migrant birds and also a Ramsar site. Standing in the back of a 4wd vehicle we were privileged to watch a sea eagle catch a fish, perch in a tree for many minutes and survey the scene before flying off with prey in its claw again.

**Minneriya Nat. Park** contains a 'tank' of the same name. Here there were plenty of birds, sambar deer and elephants. In all we must have seen 160 elephants in several herds - some in small family groups, the occasional loner and larger groups. We were absorbed in the behaviour of these wonderful creatures in their natural environment -

- a baby not more than 1 week old (our guide said) suckling with upturned trunk
- the herd grazing on dry grasses plucked and held in the tip of the trunk to shake out the dust, the inexpert younger ones losing half of this fodder in the process
- elephants dust bathing and also in the water
- a huge, probably dominant male quietly gathering his family together within the larger herd
- sparring younger males occasionally trumpeting
- an older female nonchalantly ignoring the approaches of one of these young males
- late afternoon, one of the other vehicles switching on the engine and caused an anxious moment as two large females slowly walking towards us decided they would charge while the half dozen vehicles hurriedly reversed –good for close up snaps
- we then observed this large group form up into about three family groups with the adults enclosing their young within the centre of each group

**Horton Plains Nat. Park** in the central hills at an altitude of 6000 ft. has wide open grasslands cut by streams looking as though trout should be there! August is the windy season, and we nearly got hypothermia as we set out in swirling mists. Protection between forests further on saved us as well as the interest of the very dense vegetation growing along the track. There were many small flowers on the plains including, I think, a first cousin of our dianellas! – large patches of a euphorbia and another pink un-identified plant. We walked to World's End – a sheer drop to a valley 1000's of feet below - and returned via Baker's Fall, having seen very few birds and the weather having improved a little.

Near Kandy, we walked for a couple of hours in **Udawattakelle Sanctuary** - a remnant of natural forest set aside centuries ago where several species are endemic to that area. In Kandy we also went on a walk in the Peradeniya Botanic Gardens, 60 hectares in all, where species have been introduced from all over the world including Australia. These were once the royal pleasure gardens.

Another highlight was 12 hours spent in **Yala West Nat. Park** in zone one only, as the rest is for limited access. Just inland from the south coast, there are many rocky formations where we hoped to spot the elusive leopard. The only evidence we saw was footprints alongside the road! However, the park was teeming with birds, sambar deer, water buffalo, and fresh water crocodiles were frequently seen, though not many elephants. Jason saw a sloth bear the previous day!

In Yala we had a wonderful time watching crocodile behaviour - many of these large reptiles (the same size as our 'salties') were lazing on muddy shores of the water holes. Then we saw one guarding its 'dinner' from others by swimming in circles round what looked like the head and bloated body of a sambar deer. Periodically it would transport its prey into deeper water away from shore and other invaders, carrying the deer on its back! Then it would come in towards shore - out and in repeatedly. Then an occasional jump and roll as it ate! There are many, many water buffalo to be seen in Yala.

In every park we saw monkeys - macaque and the larger langur- we even had them in the vehicle at Yala trying to eat our picnic! We had an interesting view in Kandy as two troupes of macaques fought over territory as we walked past. Little squirrels were everywhere and equally as cheeky.

I have just told some snippets but do recommend going yourselves! Some of the highlights of our birding are listed - it was all so wonderful. We saw 70 species all told including the Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Bulbuls, Barbets, Fish Owl, Crested Serpent Eagle, Indian Roller, Flowerpecker, Adjutant Stork, Open-billed Stork, Painted Stork, Crested Hawk Eagle, Grey-headed Fishing Eagle, Hornbill, Parakeets and seven species of Kingfishers.

## 61 Hunter Street – Winter Report

During May the first robins appeared at the birdbaths – first a pair of scarlets, followed by the rose-breasted pair. There were occasional skirmishes about bathing priorities when their visits coincided. The solitary Grey Thrush which disappeared over summer, returned in May to brighten the winter gloom with cheerful morning calls as he forages outside the bedroom window. Eastern Spinebills and New Holland Honeyeaters have had to resort to the large daphne bush and camelias for these lean times. The New Holland Honeyeaters have not succeeded in ridding themselves of their five offspring this season, and are still together as a family despite frequent and noisy attempts to drive them off.

Lately there have been small clouds of insects after rain and the Grey Fantails and New Holland Honeyeaters display their acrobatic skills as they feed in mid-air. Female Blue Wrens, Yellow-rumped and Striated Thornbills, Silvereyes, Goldfinches (five on one occasion) and Crimson Rosellas, come and go. Two pairs of Striated Pardalotes are challenging each other daily, in the vicinity of the nesting boxes – and despite the aggressive Red Wattlebirds. The Blackbird pair, a few friendly Magpies and the “Buda” Kookaburras are also with us and there has been some welcome relief from ravens this year.

Shirley Parnaby

## Brief Visit by Yellow-tailed Cockatoos.

Alerted by their weird screeches, I observed eight to ten Yellow-tailed Cockatoos swinging in all directions on our Aleppo Pine *Pinus halepensis* and not finding the cones to their liking they moved to a nearby eucalyptus for a short outrageous time and then noisily moved away to the south. Later I inspected the pine and collected the newly removed cones.

June Symms

**Congratulations** to Margaret Panter and Debbie Worland on receiving awards for achievement in the area of conservation at a recent North Central Catchment Management Authority gathering.

## Jackass Flat Flora Reserve – Leader: Ern Perkins 15/8/04

Jackass Flat is a 71 ha Conservation Reserve off Avery's Road in North Bendigo. It is an interesting area botanically with a mix of plants from both northern Victoria and the Castlemaine area.

This very degraded area near Avery's Road was selected in 1989 for replanting by the Bendigo FNC and the Bendigo native Plant Group. The ground was bare yellow clay that was impossible to dig in winter and brick hard in summer. Seed was collected and grown on and plots were planted and some areas direct seeded. The plots were fenced but subsequently much of this work was vandalised and few of the tube stock survived the winter wet and the summer baking. Results were best from the direct seeding. Much of the area has since been invaded by Spiny Rush.

The ten brave souls who braved the cold windy conditions were able to identify a good number of plants from the list supplied by Ern including some of the species of interest which included: Slaty Sheoak *Allocasuarina muelleriana*, Red Ironbark *Eucalyptus tricarpa*, Totem Poles/ Cross-leaf Honey-myrtle *Melaleuca decussata*, Violet Honey-myrtle *Melaleuca wilsonii*, and Stiff Westringia *Westringia rigida*. The two not sighted were Star Hair *Astrotricha linearis* ssp 1 and Ruddy Beard-heath *Leucopogen rufus*.

The only plants flowering were wattles (*A. aspera*, *A. genistifolia*, *A. pycnantha*), some Shrub Violets *Hybanthus floribundus* and the Yellow Gum *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* ssp *pruinosa*. Other listed plants that were identified were:

Gold-dust Wattle *Acacia acinacea*, Hakea Wattle *Acacia hakeoides*, Honeypots *Acrotriche serrulata*, Cranberry Heath *Astroloma humifusum*, Bristly Wallaby-grass *Austrodanthonia setacea*, Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa* ssp *spinosa*, Common Fringe-myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*, Inland Pigface *Carpobrotus modestus*, Sticky Cassinia *Cassinia uncata*, Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea *Davesia leptophylla*, Gorse Bitter-pea *Davesia ulicifolia*, Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella admixta*, Scented Sundew *Drosera whittakeri* ssp *aberanns*, Nodding Saltbush *Einadia nutans* ssp *nutans*, Grey Box *Eucalyptus microcarpa*, Red Box *Eucalyptus polyanthemos* ssp *vestita*, Bushy Needlewood *Hakea decurrens* ssp *physocarpa*, Leafless Currant-bush *Leptomeria aphylla*, Grey Everlasting *Ozothamnus obcordatus*, Dwarf Greenhood *Pterostylis nana*, Twiggy Bush-pea *Pultenaea largiflora*, Slender Groundsel *Senecio tenuiflorus* and Twining Fringe-lily *Thysanotus patersonii*.

PS. According to a letter in the Bendigo FN Club's latest Whirrakee, the burnt area we saw was the site of a controlled burn aimed at preventing "an uncontrollable wild fire". People from neighbouring properties are pleased with the result and are requesting a further burn in the far northern section of the reserve. Others believe the result was an over kill in an area deemed to be the "southernmost point" for some Whipstick species.

Geraldine Harris

## **Swift Parrot Survey 31/7/04, 1/8/04.**

No new sightings were recorded but swifties are still present at the Golf Course – previously they have left around mid July.

Two new sighting have been reported: in the bush off Sawmill Road, Castlemaine (Geoff Harris); and near Glenluce (Robyn Garnett and Phil Collier).

### **Swifties on the Ground**

Five times in the last ten days I have seen groups of swifties ranging from 5-30 birds feeding on the ground. When contacted, Chris Tzaros ( Birds Australia) said that of all the hundreds of times he has been out looking for swifties he has seen them on the ground less than ten times. He thinks that they are drinking out of puddles, eating Cranberry Heath flowers or eating lerps that have been washed out of the canopy by the rain. In this case I think the swifties must have been eating lerp as there were no puddles or Cranberry Heath flowers.

Debbie Worland

P.S. Garry Cheers and Rob Price recently visited the Golf Club/ Erin Court site with Debbie Worland and were very impressed with this first recorded return site for Swift Parrots.

### **Bird Recovery in Logged Areas**

From Birds Australia EMU Journal

A study in NSW suggests that it could take up to 22 years for a population of most bird species to recover in regrowth areas after intensive logging. The study also showed that some hollow nesting bird species, such as cockatoos and treecreepers, had not fully recovered where no old trees containing nesting hollows were retained. For these species of forest avifauna it may take up to 165 years for suitable tree hollows to form in regrowth forests, underlining the importance of a number of old growth trees being left to remain after logging and the retention of unlogged forests along all drainage lines. This and other management procedures and conservation planning at the local level is also needed to ensure suitable habitat quality remains in close proximity to logged coupes. Unless unlogged or older aged forest surrounds or is in close proximity to logged areas much longer rotation periods will be required.

Chris Morris

### **An Annual Spring Event**

Each spring a Brown-headed Honeyeater can be seen perching on Princess's head pecking out her fur. The honeyeater looks comical with its long grey fur moustache and Princess appears unperturbed. Princess is a hand reared kangaroo that has chosen not to leave home.

Beri Perry

## **“A Tree’s Prayer” by an unknown Persian poet.**

Ye who pass by and raise your hand against me,  
harken ere you harm me.

I am the heat of your hearth on cold winter nights,  
The friendly shade screening you from the summer sun  
and my fruits are refreshing draughts quenching your thirst  
as you journey on.

I am the beam that holds your house,  
the board of your table,  
the bed on which you lie  
and the timber that builds your boats.

I am the handle of your hoe,  
the door of your home,  
the wood of your cradle,  
the shell of your coffin.

I am the bread of kindness and the flower of beauty.  
Ye who pass by, listen to my prayer.  
Harm me not – I am a tree.

Found amongst photos of wartime North Africa and Italy - it sounded pretty good  
when read in the western desert!

Stuart Morris.

### **Observations**

- **Scarlet Robin** in a deciduous tree in Lyttleton St. 28/7/04 (Frances Cincotta).
- **Sugar Gliders** in flowering gum at dusk (Natasha Harris).
- **Mallee Ringneck parrots, Diamond Doves and Diamond Firetails** building nests sighted on a visit to Terrick Terrick (Robyn Garnett and Phil Collier).
- **Dozens of Scented Sundews and a Mistletoe Bird** in Kaweka. (Ern Perkins)
- **Choughs.** Natalie de Marcus has resorted using plastic snakes to frighten off the Choughs digging in her garden and bush.
- **Black-chinned Honeyeaters** seen eating on the ground – Chris Morris has not seen this before.
- **Two dead male echidnas** on road on way home from Shepparton. August is the time when male echidnas form trains looking for female mates. (Natasha Harris).
- **Signs of Spring.** The large Blue-tongued Lizard has emerged from hibernation under the paved area below our clothes line; Bronzewing Pigeons are calling from the Kalimna bush behind us at Parker Street East; and the breeding pair of Southern Boobooks in the garden at “Buda” confirm it all (Shirley Parnaby).
- **Whistling Kite** over Castlemaine 18/8/04 (Rita Mills).
- **Spotted Pardalotes** sitting outside their tiny holes on the bank along the path to the Beehive falls in the Grampians, with females approaching timidly from nearby bushes (Geraldine Harris).

- **Striated Pardalotes** creatively nesting in electricity pole structures (Hans van Gemert).
- **Wildflowers Blooming:** Sticky Boronia is flowering in the gully at Irish Town. In the Bendigo bush adjacent to Sandhurst Reservoir – Purple Coral Pea, Common Hovea, Downy Grevillea, Goldfields Grevillea, Wax Flowers and Scented Sundews. Along Demo Track – Scented Sundews, lots of Leopard Orchids, Greenhoods, Blue Caladenia. A wonderful display of Southern Shepherds-purse in the moss on Mt Alexander; and crops of Chocolate Lilies everywhere (Richard Piesse). Golden Moths, Leopard Orchids, Yellow Stars, Common Hovea, Early Nancys at the top of the Broom Pull site (Rita Mills).
- Scented Sundews in profusion in the Harcourt Nature Reserve (Hans van Gemert).

## **From the Business Meeting 26/8/04**

**Roadside surveys** to be carried out along Porcupine Ridge Rd., Old Coach Rd. and Dingo Farm Rd.

**Buffer Zones.** Shire to meet with a deputation from Friends of the Box Ironbark, Castlemaine Landcare Groups and Castlemaine Field Naturalists to discuss a recommendation that buffer zones be an integral part of part planning for new residential developments and other conservation areas and State Parks etc.

**GPS units.** The Club has received donations of two additional GPS units. These are available for use by club members.

## **Extra Events for your Calendar**

**Sept. 1 – Oct. 1 Spring in the Bendigo Bush.** Event programme available at September Meeting or Ph. Discovery Centre Bookings 5443 8255.

**Sun. Sep. 12. Crimson Spider Orchid Survey.** Volunteers needed.

Phone Jenni Collier on 0409 413 819.

**Sat. 18 and Sun. 19 Sept. Wildflower Show:** 10am – 4pm at the Senior Citizens rooms, Old High St., Golden Square. Details August newsletter.

**Sat.18 and Sun.19 Sept. Angair Inc. 2004 Wildflower Show.** Memorial Hall, McMillan St., Anglesea. Further information: Phone 5263 1085 or 5289 6562.

**Sun. Oct. 17. Walk in the bush to look at wildflowers.** Kath and John Polinelli have invited members to visit their property in Mia Mia Rd (3.35km from Pyrenees Highway, Newstead), 2pm.

**Feb. 2006 Australian Naturalist's Network.** The fourth Campout in Feb 2006 is to be held at Harrietville / Perisher Valley or Jindabyne. If interested register intention to attend.

**Articles Welcome -** Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 184, Castlemaine, 3450.

Ph. 5474 2244, or [gedharris@castlemaine.net](mailto:gedharris@castlemaine.net)

Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

**Disclaimer -** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

## **Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme- September 04**

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

**Excursions** are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting and leave promptly at the times stated from The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days. BYO morning and afternoon tea.

**Business meetings** are held at 27 Doveton Street on the fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

**Fri. Sep. 10. *Conserving Forest Wildlife.*** Richard Loyn, Arthur Rylah Institute. UCA Hall, 8pm.

**Sat. Sep. 11. *Mandurang – Greater Bendigo National Park.*** Leader: Rita Mills, Ph. 5472 4553. Leave the Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.

**Wed. Sep. 15. *Wildflower Walk (1).*** Rita Mills, Ph 5472 4553. All these walks leave the Octopus at 4pm sharp. Back in town by 5.30pm.

**Wed. Sep. 22. *Wildflower Walk (2).*** Margaret Panter, Ph. 5470 5072 (7am-8pm). Muckleford. . Leave the Octopus at 4pm sharp. Back in town by 5.30pm.

**Wed. 29. *Wildflower Walk (3).*** Penny Garnett, Ph. 5472 3142. Yapeen/ Muckleford Rd. Leave the Octopus at 4pm sharp. Back in town by 5.30pm.

**Wed. Oct. 6. *Wildflower Walk (4).*** Frances Cincotta, Ph. 5476 2691. Octopus 4pm.

**Fri. Oct. 8. *Macquarie Island and Penguins.*** Pauline Riley. UCA Hall, 8pm.

**Sat. Oct. 9. *Humbolt – Taradale/Drummond Road.*** Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph 5472 3124 . Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.

**Wed. Oct. 13. *Wildflower Walk (5).*** Richard Piesse, Ph. 5472 3191. Octopus 4pm.

**Fri. 29 Oct. – Tues. Nov. 2. *SEANA Campout at Little Desert Nature Lodge.***

**Fri. Nov.12. *Wombat Community Forest Management*** Tim Anderson.UCA Hall 8pm

**Sat. Nov.13. *South German Mine Area, Maldon.*** Leader: Ern Perkins, Ph. 5472 3124. Leave Octopus at 1.30pm sharp. Good birding -bring binoculars.

**2004 Committee** - Chris Morris (President) Ph. 9885 4221; Rita Mills (Vice President and Public Officer) Ph. 54724553; George Broadway (Secretary) Ph. 5472 2513; Hans van Gemert (Treasurer) Ph. 5472 1082; Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Ed.) Ph. 5474 2244; Ern Perkins Ph. 5472 3124; Richard Piesse; Athol Dorman and Nigel Harland.

### **Subscriptions for 2004**

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

*Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc., PO Box 324, Castlemaine. Inc #A0003010B*